

GORBACHEV OFFERS CONDITIONAL TALKS WITH LITHUANIANS

COUPLED WITH A WARNING

'Grave Consequences' Seen if Independence Declaration by Baltic Land Stands

By ESTHER B. FEIN

Special to The New York Times

MOSCOW, March 31 — President Mikhail S. Gorbachev offered to open a discussion with Lithuanian leaders tonight if they repealed their declaration of independence, and he warned the Lithuanian people that failure to comply with his request "could have grave consequences for all of us."

In separate appeals to the Lithuanian Parliament and the Lithuanian people, Mr. Gorbachev seemed to be signaling for the first time that the Kremlin was willing to negotiate with Lithuania, but the offer was couched in terms unacceptable to the leadership of the breakaway republic. [Texts of the statements, page 16.]

The Lithuanian President, Vytautas Landsbergis, described the appeals as "threats" and said the Lithuanian Parliament would resume its work on Monday.

Sees Dire Effects

Mr. Gorbachev did not specify what the "grave consequences" could be. He has said several times that the Lithuanian Parliament's actions could have dire effects on the republic's economy, and although the Kremlin has repeatedly ruled out the use of force in solving this crisis, the increased presence of Soviet troops in the republic is bound to lead many to believe that Mr. Gorbachev is threatening military action.

Given previous exchanges between the Kremlin and the Lithuanian leadership in Vilnius, the Lithuanian capital, Mr. Gorbachev presumably anticipated Mr. Landsbergis's dismissal of his offer. But after a week in which Lithuanian leaders chided the Kremlin for failing to negotiate with them over the current crisis, the Soviet leader's strategy apparently is to cast the Lithuanian leaders in the role of hardliners, unwilling to grasp his extended hand.

Seeking Common Ground

But the fact that Mr. Gorbachev answered the Lithuanian Parliament's earlier calls for dialogue could be a sign that the two sides are at least seeking common ground.

[United States officials say the Lithuanian crisis threatens to disrupt progress on a range of Soviet-American issues. Page 16.]

Mr. Gorbachev's statements, which were read at the beginning of the main evening news program, come a day after President Bush sent a message to the Kremlin urging a peaceful resolution to the conflict. He had stated that the United States was "not trying to make things difficult" for either side and reiterated Washington's support for self-determination for Lithuania.

In his appeal to the Lithuanian legislators, Mr. Gorbachev called on them to "immediately annul the illegal acts" they had adopted, saying that "such a step will open a possibility for discussing the entire range of problems on the solely acceptable basis — within the framework of the Soviet constitution."

Then, addressing the Lithuanian people directly, Mr. Gorbachev warned

that "if the voice of reason is not heeded now, developments could have grave consequences for all of us."

Mr. Gorbachev's tone was more ominous and his thoughts more concentrated in tonight's appeals, but the message is the same one the Kremlin has issued since the stalemate with Lithuania over its self-proclaimed independence began nearly three weeks ago: that the Lithuanian act was illegal and invalid, and that a republic could separate from the Soviet Union only by following the Soviet Constitution through a course that has yet to be prescribed by the new Soviet Parliament.

Mr. Landsbergis treated Mr. Gorbachev's proposal essentially as a non-offer, saying, "I regret that President Gorbachev did not hear the voices of the world inviting the Soviet Union to start dialogue and negotiations with Lithuania."

On Monday, Back to Work

He again tried to coax support from other countries and tried to demonstrate the ineffectiveness of Mr. Gorbachev's appeal to Lithuania to reverse its decisions by declaring that "the day after tomorrow, the Lithuanian Parliament will resume its work and on its agenda it will consider this unexpected statement of President Gorbachev."

Underscoring his attempt to focus responsibility for the outcome of events on the Lithuanian leaders, Mr. Gorbachev emphasized to the legislators that they were liable for "Lithuanians and non-Lithuanians, for their security and well-being, for the destiny of democracy in the whole of our country and of stability in the world."

Increasing Pressure on Republic

In his statement, Mr. Gorbachev criticized the Lithuanian Parliament for dire decisions "adopted in haste, without consultations and discussions, actually within one night."

Mr. Gorbachev's appeals were made at the recommendation of the Council of Federation, a new presiden-

tial advisory board comprised of the leaders of the 15 Soviet republics and other members, which met on Friday.

Moscow has been steadily increasing its pressure on the renegade republic by issuing harsh decrees, rounding up army deserters who had been offered protection by the Lithuanian Parliament and stationing Soviet troops at public buildings. Initially, the troops occupied only Communist Party buildings, but on Friday night, they were dispatched to the procurator's office and the main printing plant in Vilnius.

Although Moscow claims authority over both institutions, the latest deployment of troops could be a sign that Moscow is gradually trying to take over all public buildings in the republic, and Lithuanian officials say they fear Parliament may be one of the next targets.

In his statement tonight, Mr. Gorbachev stressed that the hasty separation of Lithuania from the Soviet Union would have disastrous economic consequences for the small republic. It is a point he raised repeatedly during a visit to Lithuania in January.

"The incumbent Lithuanian leaders are trying to convince you that their separatist actions will not affect the

economic, scientific, technical and other ties with the other republics of the Soviet Union," Mr. Gorbachev said in appealing to the Lithuanian people. "But this is not so, because all these ties can develop normally and yield fruits only in a favorable atmosphere of confidence and mutual assistance and not in the situation of confrontation, ultimatums, disrespect for one another and ethnic strife."

Demonstrations of Support

He further added that people from around the Soviet Union, whose "just indignation" had been aroused by the Lithuanian action, had appealed to the Soviet leadership to take "effective economic, political and administrative measures" against the republic.

Earlier in the day, demonstrations were held in several Soviet cities to show solidarity with the people of Lithuania. In the Ukrainian capital of Kiev, about 20,000 people defied an official ban and gathered in support of Lithuania, according to Ivan Drach, head of Rukh, the Ukrainian nationalist movement.

Mr. Drach said that after initial warnings that the demonstration was illegal, police allowed the meeting to go on unharrassed.

In Soviet Georgia, demonstrators called for an end to the occupation of Lithuania and its neighboring Baltic republics of Estonia and Latvia. And several hundred people gathered this afternoon in Gorky Park in Moscow to denounce the use of troops in Lithuania and to support the right of every republic to secede from the Soviet Union.